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RUEHZS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HANOI 001320

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SUBJECT: VIETNAMESE DISSIDENTS ANNOUNCING A NEW PARTY;  
SECURITY WEIGHING OPTIONS

REF: A. HCMC 412  
1B. HCMC 318

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Classified By: Charge D'Affairs John Boardman. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Summary: On May 29, a meeting convened by prominent Hanoi dissident Hoang Minh Chinh to prepare documents in advance of a planned June 1 declaration of the re-establishment of the Democracy Party of Vietnam (DPV), was raided by police. A member of the new party called a public meeting with western diplomats to call attention to this event and to announce that the DPV will proceed with plans to declare themselves to the world via an internet center in California. Ministry of Public Security (MPS) officers informed us that they are well aware of the DPV's activities and plan to take a "wait-and-see" approach to the dissidents so long as the international community does not actively support them. Meanwhile, other political dissidents continue to press their message domestically and using overseas Internet websites. The GVN understands that the next two months are critical for maintaining Vietnam's reputation on human rights in order to finesse PNTR through congress. Up to this point, GVN officials have chosen not to respond forcefully to dissident activity. The dissident community believes that Hanoi is reluctant to act and is pushing the envelope accordingly. The organizers of the DPV have timed their move to force the GVN to either tacitly allow them to organize their party or to crack down at a time when Vietnam is trying to show its best face to the world, particularly to the United States. End Summary.

Raid of the Meeting at Hoang Minh Chinh's

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12. (C) On May 29, Vietnamese Human Rights Lawyer Nguyen Van Dai sent a broadcast e-mail message to western diplomats requesting a meeting to discuss recent police harassment of Hanoi dissidents. The meeting was held May 30 with British, EC, French and Australian diplomats. Embassy Poloff also attended. In addition to Dai, Nguyen Phuong Anh, Luong Duy Phuong, Pham Sy Nguyen and Bach Ngoc Duong also attended. The meeting occurred in a cafe in a public mall and was closely watched, videotaped and audio recorded by plainclothes MPS officers.

13. (SBU) Dai reiterated his e-mail allegations as follows. On Saturday, May 27, Dai, writer Hoang Tien, Professor Tran Khue, and Chinh met at Chinh's home to discuss his plans to

declare on 1 June that the DPV is re-established. (Note: According to Dai, the DPV existed from 1946 until it was shut down by the GVN in 1988. Chinh was General Secretary of the DPV despite serving as an expert in Marxist ideology for the state during this period. End Note.) The participants primarily discussed Chinh's draft by-laws for the reconstituted party from 4 p.m. until they adjourned at 7 o'clock. After the meeting, Tran Khue and Hoang Tien were planning to remain at Chinh's residence while Dai went home.

¶4. (SBU) Dai reiterated that as the housekeeper opened the gate to Chinh's home, police and MPS officers rushed into the house and attempted to confiscate all of the party documents in Chinh's desk. Dai was not stopped as he exited and returned safely home. Dai said the police questioned Chinh who claimed that he was the sole author of the party documents. The police wrote up a report and asked Chinh to sign it (NFI) and then took Tran Khue and Hoang Tien to Hang Bai Precinct station. Khue and Tien were detained until one o'clock in the morning.

¶5. (SBU) In a separate conversation with Khue, the political activist confirmed Dai's recounting of the breakup of the DPV meeting. Khue noted that police were "extremely mild and respectful" to him during his interview session. Police probed and Khue told them of the intention to resurrect the DPV. According to Khue, the police said that "it was not a suitable time" to revive the DPV. Khue rejoindered that political pluralism is a historical trend that Vietnam cannot avoid. Khue plans to return to HCMC on June 2.

¶6. (SBU) Dai confirmed that he was also called in by the police to visit Hang Bai station while the others were detained. The police questioned Dai about the documents and he told them that he helped draft the party's by-laws. The

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police asked Dai to allow them to check his computer the following day. Dai was released at 11:50 that night.

¶7. (SBU) Dai confirmed that the morning of May 28, Khue, Tien and another dissident named Tran Anh Kim (who reportedly arrived in Hanoi from Thai Binh Province that morning) had lunch together at Thang Long restaurant in central Hanoi. As they were leaving the cafe, police forcibly took Kim to a nearby police station and detained him for four hours. Tran Khue subsequently told us that the police first told Kim that there were criminal charges against him, but once in police custody they questioned him exclusively about the DPV. Police finally bought a bus ticket for Kim to return to Thai Binh province and made him return immediately.

¶8. (SBU) Dai reiterated that in the afternoon of May 28, six police searched Dai's office and found the DPV by-laws on the hard drive of his laptop computer. On leaving, the police told him that they will "continue to work with him in the days to come."

Democratic Party of Vietnam Plans

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¶9. (C) Dai reported that since he sent the e-mail on May 29, the Deputy Hanoi Police Director, Nguyen Van Sy, called him in to warn that if Dai continues to help Chinh and Khue re-establish the DPV, the police will arrest him. Nevertheless, Dai intends to keep working for the party. He said that Chinh will declare the re-foundation of the party on June 1. Twenty members of the party will be officially recognized, with the remaining membership kept secret for the time being. An oral declaration will be transmitted to an information center set up by Vietnamese political groups in California (NFI) and then retransmitted to Vietnam and to the world press by the center. The DPV plans to "bombard" Vietnamese information outlets with the declaration, he said.

¶10. (C) Dai said that the DPV will wait ten days to gauge the GVN's reaction to the re-declaration of the party after which Khue (now officially declared as Deputy General Secretary of the party) will establish a party office in Ho Chi Minh City.

In addition, another secret political party known as the Bach Viet Democracy Party, founded by Nguyen Phuong Anh on May 9, plans to join together with the DPV. Anh explained that his party is aimed at establishing a democratic and prosperous Vietnam. The name Bach Viet is a reference to the traditional hundred tribes which ruled ancient Vietnam together (NFI), thus suggesting that power should be shared by more than one political party. Anh refused to provide any more details about the membership or activities of his party, except to say that virtually all of the party's organization and work has occurred online and through e-mail. "The international community will hear all about us very soon," he predicted.

#### Initial Reaction from Ministry of Public Security

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¶11. (C) Poloff met May 31 with three members of the MPS's General Department of Security (GDS). This meeting was scheduled before the meeting on May 30. These officers are plainclothes agents known as the "political police" and they handle political crimes as well as intelligence/counterintelligence against foreign missions. They also monitor the overseas Vietnamese community.

¶12. (C) Deputy Director of the GDS Nguyen The Cong was completely familiar with the participants and subject matter of the previous evening's meeting and told Poloff that the DPV and its leaders are very well known to the GDS. The GDS has been monitoring this group's activities for a very long time, Cong said, and has refrained from taking any action beyond warning them not to break the law. "We have tried to avoid a situation with international significance," Cong said.

¶13. (C) Cong noted pointedly that the group's members, and Dai in particular, had greatly intensified their political activities after returning from the United States. It appears, he said, that the United States is either encouraging or supporting the creation of illegal political organizations in Vietnam. (Note: Dai recently confirmed to Poloff that he received USD 20,000 - 30,000 National

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Endowment for Democracy funding on a recent visit to the United States. He is using this money to fund training for other Human Rights lawyers; e.g. Luong Duy Phuong noted above. Poloff did not/not mention this to the MPS. End Note).

¶14. (C) Poloff asked Cong what MPS response to the group will be. Cong answered that the MPS response will depend on the concrete activities of the group, and, especially, the involvement of the international community. If the group appears to be receiving material or political assistance from another country, particularly the United States, it will increase the severity of the issue "greatly," he said. At the moment, the GDS is pursuing a "wait-and-see" approach towards the group, though Cong acknowledged that some of the group's members have been formally warned by the police that they are breaking the law and risking arrest.

¶15. (C) Cong said MPS has a range of actions it may take in response to the DPV's illegal activity. At the highest level, he said, the members of the group could all be arrested. "We do not prefer this option," Cong explained, "because for one thing it leaves us with no other further options, and for another it would create problems with the international community. Other options include house arrest for some or all of the group's leaders (an option, Cong said, that would specifically preclude any of the group's leaders from meeting with foreigners) and more formal warnings. "What we do will depend on the concrete actions the group

takes, and on the actions the international community takes."

U.S. support for the group would trigger action against its members, Cong said. He defined "support" as including financial or material support, training or other assistance to the group's members, and public endorsements of the group's activities or purpose.

¶16. (C) "We understand the situation in terms of bilateral relations," Cong said, "and we have no desire to complicate things. This is why we have allowed these people to carry on their secret illegal activities for so long without arresting or imprisoning them." However, he cautioned, the GDS has its own domestic political equities to consider, and if the group pushes too far, or involves foreign support, it will create irresistible pressure on the GDS to act. He vowed that GDS' response to the group will be as measured as possible, and implored Poloff to prevent the group or anyone in the United States from escalating the situation to the point where GDS would be forced to make arrests.

#### Other Dissidents Also Pushing Hard

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¶17. (SBU) In parallel to the DPV, other political dissidents continue to press their message domestically and in overseas Internet websites. HCMC-based dissident Do Nam Hai (aka Phuong Nam) and Hue-based Father Nguyen Van Ly created the "8406 group," named for the April 8, 2006 "Declaration on Democracy and Freedom for Vietnam" that the two men co-authored. The "Declaration on Democracy" was originally signed by 118 Vietnamese activists, largely from HCMC, Hue and Hanoi. Father Ly has been very active in collecting additional signatures domestically; the latest iteration has 463 names, some from provinces such as Thai Binh or Hai Duong, areas that have not seen recent dissident activity. Some figures in the HCMC Protestant house church community have joined the 8406 Group, including Mennonite Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang and his wife and Pastor Tran Mai, head of the Inter-Evangelistic Movement church. Separately, Father Chan Tin continues to publish a bi-weekly web-based magazine with essays and news from domestic and overseas political activists entitled "Freedom of Speech," which was launched in April.

¶18. (C) The upsurge in activity appears to have exposed fissures in approach and philosophy within the dissident community. Tran Khue did not sign the "Declaration on Democracy," and instead issued his own manifesto on the Internet. Father Ly subsequently criticized Khue for taking too mild a position vis-a-vis the Communist Party, particularly for acknowledging that the CPV could reform gradually. Prominent HCMC dissident Nguyen Dan Que has not yet openly contributed to the flow of dissident materials on the web; Do Nam Hai told us that Que opted out of signing the "Declaration on Democracy," or a related document "the Appeal of Democratic Activists" that Hai issued on April 6. Que is

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aware of the activities of the DPV organizers, however. Que has an active ADSL connection at home, although his landline phone remains cut. MPS maintains that Que's phone problems are technical, not political.

#### Comment

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¶19. (C) If Chinh and his associates move ahead as planned and declare their party on June 1, the GVN will be placed in a difficult position. Hanoi understands that the next two months are critical for maintaining Vietnam's reputation on human rights in order to secure congressional approval of Permanent Normal Trading Relations for Vietnam and thus complete Vietnam's eligibility for WTO entry. Up to this point, GVN officials have chosen not to respond forcefully to dissident activity. Although the warning he received was clear, Khue was treated with kid gloves in his police

interview in Hanoi. Father Ly's organizing activity in central Vietnam for the 8406 Group is unprecedented in recent memory, and Do Nam Hai shrugged off earlier police warnings in March and remains very active in HCMC. The dissident community seems to believe that Hanoi is reluctant to act and is taking advantage of this to push the envelope. In this regard, the organizers of the DPV have timed their move to force the GVN to either tacitly allow them to organize their party or to crack down at an awkward time (with Vietnam just having signed its WTO bilateral with the United States at the APEC Trade Ministerial in HCMC). One thing seems clear: the DPV likely will make a splash and the USG should consider its appropriate reaction very carefully.

BOARDMAN